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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAR VDEPIRRO, S/ES-O/CMS
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR, OFDA
STATE PASS AGRICULTURE
TREASURY FOR ERIN NEPHEW

E.O. 12958: N/A

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EAID, ETRD, ECON, HA

SUBJECT: STORM AFTERMATH IN HAITI: DEVESTATING AGRICULTURAL DAMAGE

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 1307

Summary

¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified -- please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Flooding from four consecutive tropical storms and hurricanes has caused substantial damage to Haiti's agricultural sector and its overall food security. The agricultural sector accounts for approximately 27 percent of Haiti's GDP. Destruction of transportation arteries is exacerbating the effects of damage to croplands and livestock and accelerating the food inflation that has been underway since late last year. The losses to this strategically important sector will further harm Haiti's already-strained economy and overall food security. New Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MARNDR) Joanas Gue has requested increased USG support to rebuild Haiti's agricultural sector. The preliminary MARNDR damage estimate of USD 20 million is preliminary and partial and almost certainly will be revised upward. USAID and other international donors are working to respond to the disaster. End Summary.

Agricultural Damage Assessment and Food Insecurity

¶3. (SBU) Minister Joanas Gue told USAID staff September 9 that the flooding caused major damage nationwide to food crops such as rice, maize, beans and plantains - which were close to being harvested - as well as major damage to livestock. Preliminary estimates indicate a 60 percent loss of spring crops (June to August) and the possible compromise of the autumn planting and harvest because of the lack of available seed. Cabaret -- a significant supplier of plantains -- for example, lost many farms to the floods. The Artibonite Valley, Haiti's traditional grainbasket, may have lost more than 20,000 hectares of rice production. GoH preliminary report indicated that over 90,000 head of cattle, goats, swine and poultry were lost across the country, especially in the South-East Department.

¶4. (U) The rural population has been significantly impacted by the hurricanes. Preliminary reports indicate that approximately 150,000 families (up to 800,000 people) have lost access to customary sources of food and reduced their ability to generate cash income. Standing maize, sorghum, bean, cassava, sweet potato crops, and banana plantations have been destroyed in at least 75 communes in the ten regions of the country. The CNSA estimates that the floods, erosion and landslides have destroyed about 64,000 hectares of

beans, maize, plantain, potato and sweet potato. USAID assesses that these figures are severely underestimated, will require additional vetting, and almost certainly will be revised upward. These figures do not take into account the affected areas that remain inaccessible. Crop and livestock damage directly and indirectly affects the entire population. The abandonment of agricultural lands and forced displacement will worsen food insecurity in the months to come.

15. (SBU) According to Minister Gue, agricultural infrastructural damage is most extensive in the Gonaives Plain (Artibonite Department), Bas Plateau Central, and Cotes du Sud (Note: Gonaives is approximately 100 miles south of Port-au-Prince and has a population of 250,000-300,000. End Note.) Less extensive damage exists in the Grande Anse, the eastern part of the North Department and Plaine des Cayes. Prior to the flooding, the Artibonite Valley, historically known for its plentiful production of rice and other food crops, possessed 18,000 hectares of rice land. Gue believes that as much as 60 percent of production from these lands could be lost.

16. (U) Gue's ministry on September 12 issued a preliminary assessment that put the dollar value of damage to the agricultural sector at more than 20 million USD. In a statement accompanying the report, Gue gave a preliminary assessment of "several tens of thousands" of hectares of rice, banana, vegetable and fruit plantations devastated; 21 irrigation systems destroyed and others severely damaged. (Note: Information on infrastructural damage has not been collected in the following areas: Artibonite Department, North Department, Nippes and Grand-Anse. End Note.) The MARNDR estimates the damage at over 25 million Haitian Gourdes (USD

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625,000) in the assessed areas. Gue also reported that the 12 million USD invested in the GoH's fertilizer subsidy program after the April food riots was also probably lost.

17. (U) Minister of Economics and Finance Daniel Dorsainvil announced on September 9 that the storms has seriously impacted the Haitian economy and would worsen food insecurity. He noted that his ministry was revising growth estimates for 2008 downward to less than 2.5 percent as a result of the exogenous shocks from the hurricanes and rising prices of food and fuel.

18. (U) Media have begun to report deaths of homeless victims in Gonaives, including at least two deaths due to hunger. The agricultural losses are causing immediate increases in food prices in Haiti, notably in the North Department, La Gonave and Gonaives. Impassable roads and collapsed bridges are preventing the transport of goods between Port-au-Prince and the provinces, which provide local food products to the capital city. Flooded road networks are also blocking access to local markets in rural areas. The result is rising food prices in much of Haiti, exacerbating the food inflation that was already underway, and which was behind violent rioting in April that brought down the government.

Government of Haiti's Response/Action/Next Steps

19. (SBU) The MARNDR's National Committee for Food Security (CNSA) will take the lead compiling a comprehensive report on the cumulative agricultural sector damage caused by tropical storms and hurricanes Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike and their impact on food security. The CNSA report will be based on the information collected in household surveys and input from focus groups. The report will include recommended plans for mitigating the damage caused by the hurricanes. It is intended to guide donor and GoH recovery interventions in the sector. The CNSA relies heavily on technical assistance support from USAID -- through the Famine Early Warning System mechanism (FEWS) implemented by Chemonics-World Food Program (WFP) and the UN's Office of Food and Agriculture Organization(FAO). Minister Gue (MARNDR) seeks USG support for the following priority areas:

-- Bean and corn seed for the next planting season in November-December. Limited seed availability in Haiti makes imports

a necessity. (Note: To help Haiti cope after the April food riots, USAID/OFDA pledged 150,000 USD for emergency seeds and tools to enable 30,000 farmers to plant basic food crops in the November-December agricultural season. End Note.)

-- Cash and Food for Work programs for clean-up and other rehabilitation/repair of major affected irrigation land. Minister Gue specifically mentioned Plaine des Gonaives, Bas Plateau and Cote Sud as the highest priorities. He added that the work done following Hurricane Jeanne in 2004 would have to be duplicated.

-- Technical advisors to assist with planning, evaluation and monitoring, donor and partner coordination, and agricultural infrastructure; plus a watershed specialist and livestock specialist.

¶10. (SBU) Minister Gue has requested an increase of the Ministry's budget of 12-15 percent, up from the normal request of 5 percent, to help rebuild agricultural infrastructure and boost domestic food production.

Donor Community Response/Action

¶11. (U) The FAO announced it would contribute 10.5 million USD needed to rehabilitate agricultural production and combat livestock illness. Five million USD will be used to rebuild the livelihoods of the farmers, two million USD to rehabilitate the irrigation network, and 3.5 million USD for emergency assistance to prevent clostridial diseases, classical swine fever and Newcastle disease.

¶12. (U) USAID has reprogrammed five million USD to assist in hurricane emergency response operations. A USAID/OFDA team is working in partnership with the USS Kearsarge air and sea assets to improve access to the affected areas and accelerate ongoing food and water distribution. The WFP will increase its food commodity stocks in the upcoming weeks with a preliminary Food for Peace contribution

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of 7 million USD. USG humanitarian assistance to Haiti amounts to 20 million USD to date.

¶13. (U) Post will continue to monitor and report on agricultural damage and assessments.

SANDERSON